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E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/24/2017  
TAGS: PGOV PREL PHUM PTER PE  
SUBJECT: FORMER PRESIDENT FUJIMORI RETURNED TO PERU

REF: A. SANTIAGO 1532

¶B. LIMA 1588  
¶C. LIMA 2369

Classified By: Political Counselor Alexis F. Ludwig for reasons 1.4(d).

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Following the surprise decision by Chile's Supreme Court to approve his extradition (Ref A), former President Alberto Fujimori was returned to Peru September 22 -- spirited to a suburban Lima police base in a carefully managed transfer that left little opportunity for political show or confrontation. Government officials have publicly expressed their satisfaction with the Chilean Court's decision, and promised that justice would now be served in Peru. Many observers are concerned that Fujimori's return could become a political distraction and undermine the country's fragile consensus. Whatever the government wished to see happen (Ref B), it now must deal with an unwelcome (but not necessarily unmanageable) political X-factor. End Summary.

¶2. (U) The September 21 announcement that Chile's Supreme Court had approved the extradition of former President Alberto Fujimori took most observers by surprise. Many believed denial was all but inevitable. Expectations notwithstanding, within 24 hours of the announcement, the extradition and transfer order was signed and the former President was put on a special Peruvian National Police (PNP) plane bound for his home country. Fujimori touched the ground in Lima -- for the first time since he left as President seven years ago -- just after 4:30 in the afternoon of September 22.

¶3. (C) The transfer process was conducted with great efficiency, painstaking attention to security and the clear intention to minimize opportunities for political grandstanding or confrontation. Pro-Fujimori political operatives had begun to mobilize following the Court's announcement, dispatching supporters to several of Lima's airports in the hopes of greeting their leader with a symbolic show. (Approximately 100 Fujimori supporters were at Lima's main international airport, a somewhat less than triumphant turnout.) In the end, the plane landed at a secondary Peruvian air force base in the southwestern part of the city where only a smattering of media representatives was standing by. The former President was then discreetly

transferred to a police helicopter -- beyond the reach of journalists and only distantly visible to television cameras -- and spirited to his temporary jail cell in the Ate Vitarte special operations police base on the eastern outskirts of Lima.

¶4. (SBU) Government officials have publicly expressed satisfaction at Fujimori's return to Peru. Many have emphasized that Chile's Supreme Court was free of political influences in approving seven of the twelve charges contained in the Peruvian government's extradition request -- two of them for human rights abuses (kidnapping and extra-judicial killing), the other five for corruption. News reports noted that Chile's Foreign Minister had received a telephone call from his Peruvian counterpart thanking him for Chile's good work. Government officials have also publicly promised that the former president would receive a fair and orderly trial and described his return to Peru as an opportunity to heal past wounds and consolidate democracy. A Foreign Ministry official told us Peru now had the chance to show the world its democratic system was up to a difficult task.

¶5. (C) Many analysts inside and outside of government are less sanguine. Some are concerned that Fujimori's presence could distract Peru from its important real challenges -- maintaining economic growth, reducing poverty, expanding Peru's engagement with the world -- and drag the country into a painful, inward-looking debate about the past. Fujimori's ambivalent legacy is rich with possibilities in this respect, sharply dividing those who believe he rescued the country from the brink of catastrophe and returned it to economic solvency from others who see him as the principal architect of a perilous assault on democracy and pervasively corrupt practices on a scale unknown even in Peru. Some prominent media commentary has focused on the latter argument, linking Fujimori's human rights abuses to a neo-liberal economic model that even President Garcia has since espoused.

¶6. (C) There is also speculation that Fujimori's return could destroy the informal alliance between the APRA-led government and Fujimori supporters and, in a worst-case scenario, undermine the country's still fragile consensus. According to inside reports, President Garcia has quietly instructed that the Fujimori case be completed quickly and discreetly -- within 6-9 months -- in order to avoid a destructive, drawn-out, and emotionally and politically draining process. (President Garcia has not yet publicly commented on the case, but is scheduled to hold a press conference on September 24.)

7 (C) Comment: The Fujimori extradition, initiated during the government of former President Toledo, has been a lose-lose proposition from the start for President Garcia. If its denial would seemingly have confirmed the APRA-led government's unholy alliance with the Fujimoristas, its approval has introduced an unwelcome X-factor into Peru's political environment. Nothing is set in stone, however, and assuming an erosion of political support for the former President over time and changing circumstances, its effects could be less grave than some fear. Still a popular figure, Fujimori's recent decision to run as a candidate for Japan's Senate caused a palpable drop in support for him here -- a drop reflected in the so far underwhelming street demonstrations since his return. In the end, much will turn on the government's ability to navigate potentially treacherous terrain while maintaining focus and keeping damage to a minimum.

MCKINLEY